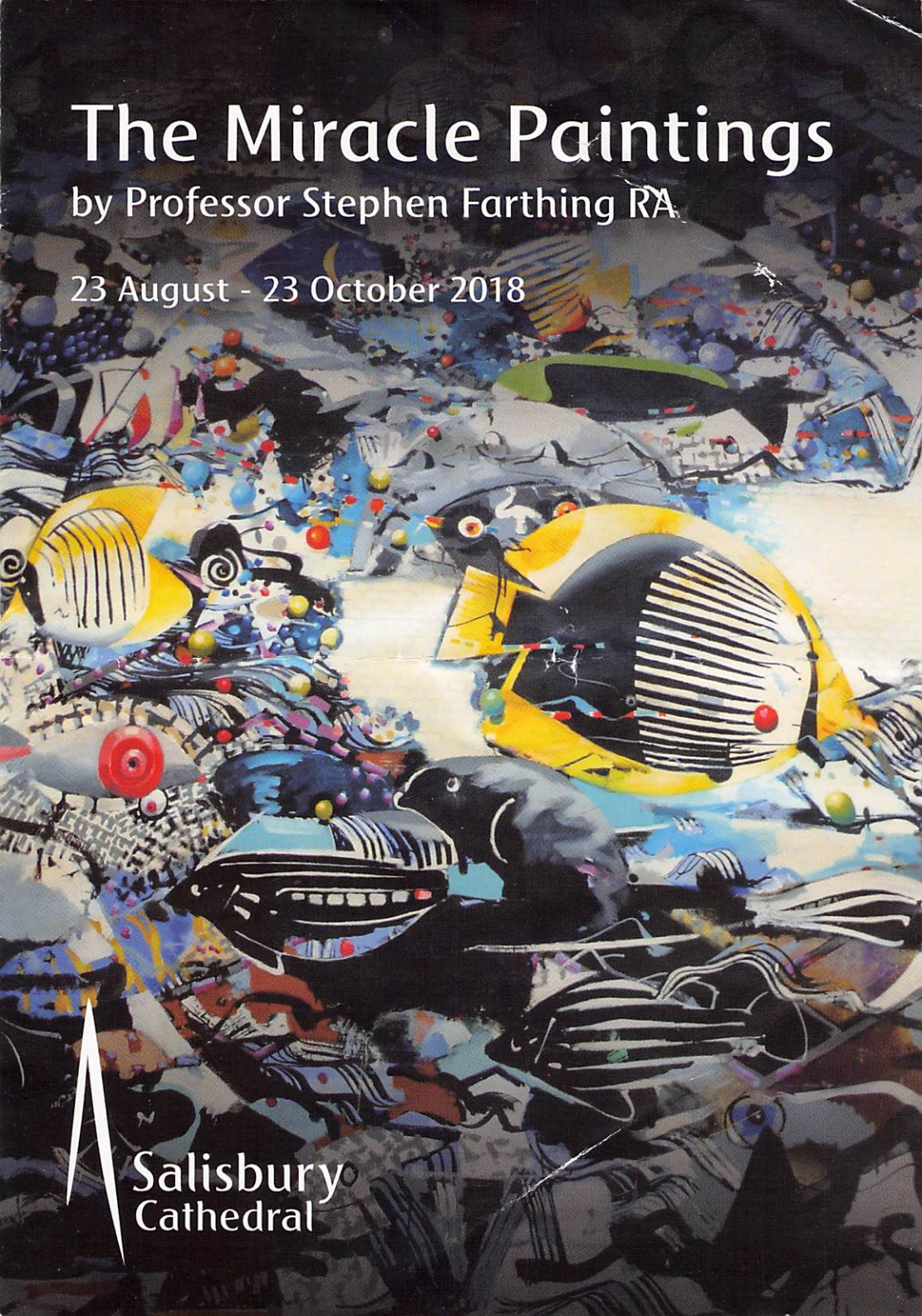
The Miracle Paintings

by Professor Stephen Farthing RA

23 August - 23 October 2018



Salisbury Cathedral

In 2011 Professor Stephen Farthing RA, one of Britain's leading figurative artists, began a body of work that would take him nearly eight years to complete and which he determined would only be shown when the series was finished. That first exhibition is taking place here as part of RA250, a series of events and exhibitions that celebrate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the Royal Academy in 1768.

Influenced by the Middle East, the paintings were created continents apart as Farthing moved around the globe with his wife and family. Each work explores the moment of a miracle – not just religious miracles, although there are some references to religious events, but the miracles of everyday life. The transformation of notes into music, words into books, the miracle of breathing, giving birth – all transformative moments which he tries to harness on his canvas.

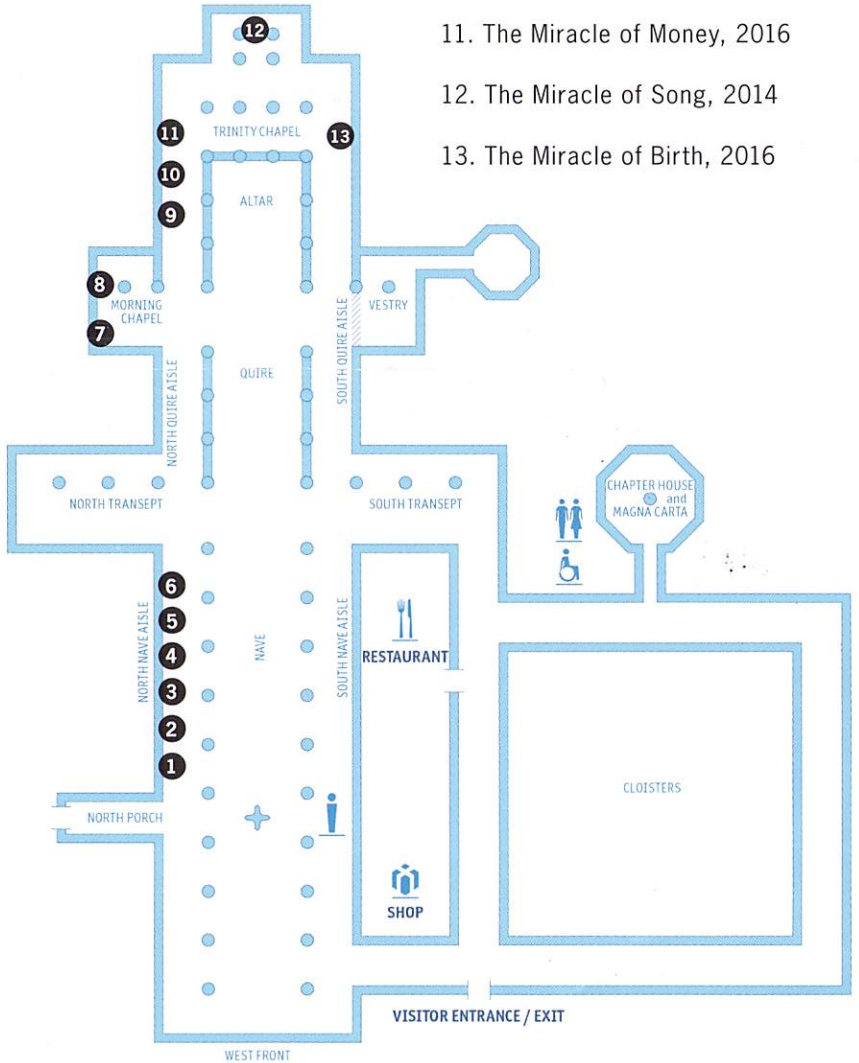
The first of the Miracle Paintings was inspired by an encounter with a Coptic Bishop during the Arab Spring in Egypt. The Bishop recounted the miracle of Mokkatam when Pope Abraam and Simon the shoemaker caused the mountain to move with their prayers. It was not so much the miracle that struck Farthing, as the power of the storyteller's belief in the miracle.

> *"The Bishop who told me the story was a qualified engineer, a rational man, and as he told me the story he looked me straight in the eyes and I could only believe that he believed every word he was saying, which I found remarkable. To hear a man tell a story that I can only think of as fiction, and know he believed every word, was spell-binding. And that's what started me on my series of pictures."*

Farthing chose to hold back the paintings and not to exhibit each canvas piecemeal or in smaller groups because he wanted them to be an entity. A single statement about the miracles that go unnoticed in daily life and the power of believing the illusion.

10. The Miracle of Geometry, 2011

1. The Miracle of Thought, 2016
2. The Miracle of the Deep, 2013
3. The Miracle of Sight 2, 2015
4. The Miracle of Flight 1, 2015
5. The Miracle of Song, 2015
6. The Miracle of Hearing, 2015
7. The Miracle of the Hand Made, 2012
8. The Miracle of the Book 2012
9. The Miracle of our Earth, 2018
10. The Miracle of Geometry, 2011
11. The Miracle of Money, 2016
12. The Miracle of Song, 2014
13. The Miracle of Birth, 2016



7. The Miracle of the Hand Made, 2012

The curator of this exhibition, Salisbury Cathedral's Visual Arts Advisor Jacquiline Creswell, has been instrumental in bringing this extraordinary unseen work to Salisbury. The location, she explains, is all important:

> *"Stephen Farthing's intriguing and vibrant paintings have never been viewed before as he wished for the series to be exhibited together in a context where the concept of a miracle may be realised, a space where faith is celebrated. There were 125 miracle stories in the Bible; today we take for granted all the wonderful miracles around us. Each work explores the moment of a miracle – not strictly those described in the Bible or religious tradition but the 'everyday' miracles of the natural world and human creativity."*

Salisbury Cathedral aims to showcase some of the best contemporary art and sculpture in this unique space. Our pioneering visual arts programme enables us to reach out to a wider audience in a fresh innovative way.

We rely on the generosity of artists and on charitable donations to continue these exhibitions. We would like to build a fund to secure the future of art at the Cathedral.

If you would like to help us by making a gift of becoming an art member please contact Jilly Wright for more information at j.wright@salcath.co.uk or call 01722 555122.

Photography: Dan Stevens

CANDIDA STEVENS GALLERY

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